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ABSTRACT

Rather than labeling the poor or slow reader as "deficient, different, or deprived," and more recently, "perceptually or neurologically impaired," the reading teacher should educate himself to recognize, accept, nourish and channel the abilities and needs of his students. Suggested are several learning activities that can aid the teacher and be used to enhance the students' reading abilities--some of which include: (1) active manipulation of print, (2) use of printed messages which elicit active, immediate response, (3) rapid visual presentation of larger syntactic units rather than letters or single words, (4) writing out conversations, (5) cloze procedure for improving use of context clues, (6) grammatical substitutions, (7) prolonged sentence games interrelating multiple visual concepts into a major idea, (8) vocabulary practice, (9) reconstruction of scrambled words or syntax, (10) sentence interrelationships, and (11) unit-centered projects to provide "reading to learn experiences." These activities are intended to supplement existing developmental and corrective reading programs, and can provide students with the kinds of practice necessary to develop more fluent reading skills. (A bibliography is included.) (HS)

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READING AND THE DISADVANTAGED: SOME PSYCHOLINGUISTIC APPLICATIONS
FOR THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

...."Joe is a 4th grader who has been retained once for poor reading. He knows his letters and the consonant sounds they make, but doesn't understand vowels. He reads slowly at the 2nd grade level and is making little progress because he is not trying. He is sullen, has very poor English, and is unwilling to read aloud. Is this a perceptual or neurological problem?....

A significant description given by the classroom teacher of a disadvantaged child. His teacher also talked of "disordered neighborhood" and of "lack of parental interest"; the typical middle-class stereotypes of personality, culture, and language were present in most of her comments. She was troubled. Despite apparently intense efforts to teach him more and more about phonics, he seemed to be responding even less. She then resorted to Joe's purported awkwardness and her observations of his left-handedness, saying "Doesn't this mean he's supposed to have trouble in reading?" Finally Joe's teacher decided to come up with something which would help alleviate her anxiety in the face of having obviously exhausted the alternatives available to her. She generated the "visual perceptual" and "neurological" etiology.

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A study of her statement describing Joe's reading and language behavior reveals an orientation to reading that suggests both she and Joe would benefit from her acquiring more modern understandings of the reading process. Indeed if she were to look into the literature in reading and linguistics of the last 5 years, she might experience a renewal of excitement, interest, and enthusiasm for the educational aspects of her work, rather than useless if not invalid attempts to seek excuses for inappropriate teaching techniques.

The classroom teacher is the dominant factor in the issue of teaching reading. Not the pediatrician, neurologist, optometrist or school psychologist. Her abilities to recognize, accept, nourish, arouse, and channel the interests, abilities and needs of her pupils, her facility to create conditions that arouse thought, activity, and imagination among pupils, are critical. She needs to know more about language, reading, and the children she is responsible for; and she must learn what implications this information has for her classroom teaching. Her children, particularly pupils like Joe, and how they read and behave toward reading, are reflections of what she knows, and does not know, how she teaches, and what she does not teach. A teacher's behavior in the face of learning difficulties with given pupils is a reflection of her professional competency. It is unfortunate when the teacher's attention is diverted needlessly from her major function, to areas representing only minute aspects of importance in her work with the greater majority of pupils like Joe.

From the outset the following points should be made clear:

- (1) the remarks that follow are not meant to exclude such factors as human physiology in learning, nor the need for massive changes in our society including our schools, and colleges of education. This paper will not deal with these issues.
 - (2) the remarks that follow are not intended to be prescriptive, only descriptive of some teaching options that could be utilized by the classroom teacher. These options illustrate another aspect of the reading process beyond decoding.
 - (3) the activities to be described might be useful as supplements to existing developmental and corrective programs. They might be particularly useful for "word bound", or grapheme-phoneme-bound youngsters who deal with reading in an ineffectual and overly piecemeal fashion.
 - (4) the activities to be described here could be useful for pupils who require some newer approaches to reading improvement for teachers who are ready to look at the reading process from a new perspective.
 - (5) the activities to be described require exploration, trial, scrutiny and refinement; they are far from finished products.
- A brief commentary on language factors will proceed the discussion of these instructional activities.

Language and the Disadvantaged Child

Children have internalized the linguistic rules of their language before they come to school. There is no justification for labelling disadvantaged children verbally deficit with the exception of children with demonstrative sensory, neurological, or affective pathology. Language behavior however is subject

to variations - both linguistic, as in the case of dialect or bilingualism and psycho-cultural variation - as in the case of the child who can speak but will not do so in school for good reason. Whatever factors might underlie language behavior - the child's linguistic system is his medium of communications and whether it is similar or different from his teacher's expectations it is a precise, predictable, satisfactory, and useful means of interacting with others as far as the child (and linguists) are concerned. It should not be tampered with by the ignorant.

Reading and Schooling

Schooling is almost always an interference with important needs of children. Along with the suppression of interaction, activity, play, expression, and sometimes human dignity - there are inordinate demands made on previously successful language behaviors - particularly in the area of receptive language. The disadvantaged child must become a listener - this requires him to be passive, attentive, and silent. He learns quickly, however, that he is "different" when he does have the opportunity to speak. Whatever that might mean, the implications become clear to him that being different is not a "good" thing. At least the way he is different. His teacher might also be unable to separate her missionary zeal to correct his "poor English" - only part of what makes him so different to her, from her responsibility to teach him to read. She might be unable to properly and intelligently utilize her district's reading program, or her own instructional biases favoring synthetic word

decoding techniques might dominate her teaching style. Whatever the case might be - and each of the above instances of inept teaching behavior are common, the child will experience some confusing introductions to the learning to read process.

The successful teacher however values people and understands the origin, and the nature of language. She is aware of the learner's needs to be regularly reinforced for language behavior and that linguistic messages both in speech and print, are interdependent wholes, not independent entities. She knows that language is cyclical involving reflection, expression, and reception, and that this requires active human interaction in a dynamic environment. She knows that the manipulation of ideas in a free and secure learning environment is critical to growth in all language areas including reading. The following activities would contribute to this teacher's ability to enhance all language abilities of her children but particularly reading. Space permits only a brief overview of some of these techniques.

Reading Activities for the Classroom Teacher

1. Active Manipulation of Print via multi-sensory in-put, involves a series of activities of high motivational and reinforcing nature: (a) cutting letters for bulletin board captions (b) printing blocks for newspapers, setting printing type for pupil's own stories to be duplicated (c) sign and poster making (d) typing stories (e) invisible ink messages (f) diagram and map making (g) printing captions for timelines, projects, experiments, scrapbooks, dioramas, etc.....

2. Action Directed Approaches require active and immediate responses to printed messages. These activities focus attention on information bearing nature of print, and create opportunities for pupils to eventually produce print by writing their own messages. A wide variety of activities are possible, some examples: (a) directions on cards: "Open your book to page 12" or "put your pencil in your desk" or "Let's go out and take a walk." (b) games in print: "Hop on your left leg three times. Do the same on your right one. Sit at my desk." (c) treasure hunts: "Find the note under your red book" (the note says) "Find the key on page 22" (note attached to key) "Open the drawer in back of you." (Finds a box with a note) "This Coca Cola is for you!"

3. Choral Reading and Impress Technique imbeds patterns of fluent language flow, by means of unison oral reading (with tutor or other children) pupil develops understanding of connection between print and spoken language. Techniques require carefully chosen materials and the sensitive selection of children who would profit from frequent exposure to this type of oral reading. The teacher must be a competent diagnostician who through observation and skills can identify pupils whose fluency in reading can be enhanced through use of these approaches. The techniques are based upon providing frequent exposure to print via oral reading experiences that are carried out in natural conversation fashion.

4. Chunking Syntactic Units develops habits of perceiving larger meaning-bearing constituents rather than letters or single

words, through rapid visual presentation of units; verbal responses or true-false and multiple choice format should be used to test comprehension rather than oral reading to avoid the word-by-word reading effect produced by oral reading: The dog/ was hungry./ It crawled into/ the chicken house./ Q - Who was hungry? Q - What did it crawl into? Q - What do you think will happen?

5. Connecting Conversation and Prose demonstrates differences between the two modes by systematic contrast and switching in game-like fashion. Pupil may respond orally, dictate to teacher, or print out responses himself: Teacher: "Hi Joe, How are you doing?" Joe: "O.K. - I guess." Teacher: "Really?" Joe: "No - Lousy I mean!" Prose version: Miss Jones was Joe's 6th grade teacher. She met him in the dentist's office and asked him how he was doing in high school. At first he said "O.K." but then he admitted "not so good." Discussions of differences between conversation and prose, as well as pupils writing out conversations, taping conversations, then typing them out and rewriting into prose or the reverse would be useful.

6. Cloze Procedures develop insight into use of language signals in print and could improve use of context clues. Passages presented utilizing either Nth word or Nth part of speech deletion. Variety of possibilities for child to employ this strategy with other techniques as well, such as Language Experience stories that he himself dictated or wrote, Action-Oriented approaches, cryptography, etc..... Example: Bill jumped away as a hail of 1. came to him. He fired at the place in

darkness from which the 2. came. Suddenly a figure rushed him. He swung his rifle at the 3. and knocked him down.

Examples of M-C items: #1 (a) arrows (b) bullets (c) rocks (d) bombs #2 (a) shots (b) spots (c) slots (d) stots #3 (a) figure (b) man (c) person (d) lady.

Responses of pupil to passages could include M-C, T-F test items, verbal discussions, and explanations of choices, etc.... In the above example sentence interrelationships have an important influence on choices.

7. Cryptography requires high degree of attention to information processing and has strong motivational influence. Pupils could eventually produce their own "codes" and pass secret messages to each other involving more and more personally developed and elaborated codes. Teacher herself must first develop and demonstrate to pupils simple "cryptograms" - printed messages in coded form - either by means of new orthography or imbedding irrelevant and confusing units into message bearing sentences. The child must break code and give message: example - Marigold Red is cows dogs the name of cats chickens a dangerous enemy birds pigs spy. (after every 3rd word two plural animate nouns are imbedded). Pupils would benefit in many areas of reading from this technique. By developing their own graphic symbolization some would be helped to understand the place, and use of symbols in messages. Those using standard orthography would have high information providing experiences with own printed messages, involves an interesting modification of the language experience approach.

8. Grammatical Substitutions sensitizes to grammatical relationships while scanning a message. Pupil rapidly scans sentence and indicates his choice. To avoid influence of phonological differences due to dialect the activity should not be carried out via oral reading: (a) side by side verb inflections: My sister (has, have) a boyfriend. (b) Within sentence substitutions: My mothers saw a mouse. or My mother sawing a mouse. or My mother saw a mice. (c) orally produced cues can influence choice: John (ask, asks, asked) a question. The pupil should experiment with changes in intonation and stress to deal with sentences such as these. (d) imbedded irrelevant items: child must utilize language signals to detect interference in flow of message: examples - The man it went home; Her boyfriend Mary is in the Army.

9. Prolonged Sentence Games develops ability to string multiple verbal concepts and interrelate them into a major idea, following the technique of "This is the house that Jack built." Approach can also influence pupils perceptions of spelling patterns: examples of one instance given by a pupil: "There are the cats, that chased the rats, that stole the hats from the store that Mike owned."

10. Vocabulary Practice - Sorting provides drill through rearranging stacks of word cards rapidly - words used should be referentials (symbols for objects, things, places, events, etc....) (a) classification sorting: pupil rapidly stacks word cards in pre-arranged categories: play-work, hot-cold, etc... (b) associational sorting: pile of word cards stacked rapidly by

pupil in pairs based upon association with one another: shoe-sock, belt-sock, green-grass, etc.... (c) mediational sorting: verbal cue producing stimuli mediating recall is given, then pupil either rapidly scans cards making choices manually or responds verbally: cue: "places people live in" - cards: hut, horse, house, help, hotel.

11. Scrambled or Distorted Order of Input requires reconstruction of printed message, sensitizing pupils to information extraction via rapid message recognition and reordering. (a) scrambled words: example - book your close; or green was John's bike broken. (b) scrambled syntax: example - to walk downtown/ it was easier/ when the traffic is heavy. (c) jumbled words: BilliselevenyearsoldandisinthefifthgradeattheArlingtonSchool.

12. Semantic Substitution sensitizes to variations in use of vocabulary by requiring child to either verbally or via sorting of cards provide a synonym or antonym for underlined lexical items in sentences: example - The happy boy was hungry: choices could be cheerful, merry, etc.... empty, famished, etc.... Child should produce sentences in print for others to manipulate. Specific parts of speech to substitute could be systematically dealt with.

13. Simple to Complex Sentences develops ability to recognize and expand simple concepts, encourages use of prepositions, and conjunctions, and provides experience with complex syntactical units of print, (a) declarative sentences: The man bought the coat. He liked it. Expansion: The man who bought the coat liked it. (b) exclamatory sentence-to-declarative: "Don't

touch that" Expansion: Mary saw the large spider and yelled "Don't touch that". (c) interrogative sentence to declarative: "Where did you go last night?" Expansion: Father asked Bill, "Where did you go last night?"

14. Sentence Interrelationships develops understanding of how sentences and their interrelations signal meanings. Pupils can produce and or search out examples in their tests and from other sources: example: (1) The man climbed the pole. (2) He fell. (3) His arm was broken. - Idea: His arm was broken due to the fall. (Place sentence (3) first and elicit new explanation). Through study and manipulation of ideas in sentence and discussion of the relationships, pupils abilities to extract information from print could be enhanced.

15. Unit Centered Project Approaches provide "reading to learn experiences" as well as experiences for multi-media activities - constructing, drawing, creative writing, etc.... Techniques involve heavy use of relevant reading content in information-extracting approach for individual and group projects. Integrates all language skills through group processes and social interaction between pupils through committee work, oral presentations, etc.... Study skills, reference techniques, writing and thinking skills are included in approach. Requires highly able teacher who is able to guide pupils help them locate and utilize materials, as well as one who can provide pertinent assistance to individuals as this is needed.

Conclusions

Disadvantaged pupils like Joe, require teachers who can break from compulsive teaching patterns and develop conditions for freeing themselves and their children so that language, thought, and natural curiosity are released and applied to learning to read. The active production and manipulation of print in information generating and extraction experiences in reading, rather than passive and piecemeal-computerized reading decoding methodology should be applied with many pupils like Joe, who read as they were taught to, often slowly, tediously, thoughtlessly, and with much pain. The activities presented here are suggestive of some experiences with print that could give pupils the kinds of practice and experiences that will help develop more fluent reading. Power and maturity in reading is another matter. The disadvantaged child has been labelled "deficit, different, deprived," and recently perceptually or neurologically impaired. Rather than esoteric labels applied to individuals or groups who have not been taught effectively, educators should begin concentrating their attention on ways to reeducate themselves and hence modernize their approaches to the teaching of reading.

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